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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE AT 2007 UNGA:
CZECH REPUBLIC

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11. The Czech Republic is justifiably proud of its record as a country actively engaged in promoting democracy and protecting human rights, particularly in oppressed societies such as Cuba, Belarus, Burma and countries in the Middle East. They are engaged in myriad projects in support of free media, they provide capacity training - notably in Belarus and other Eastern European nations as well as Iraq and Afghanistan - and they are committed to building relationships with civil society, notably youth. In addition to the work of the Czech government, there is vibrant support within the Czech NGO community for human rights and democracy promotion. Embassy Prague enjoys a close working relationship with Czech officials and NGOs on these issues.

Czech Human Rights and Democracy Priorities

12. Democracy promotion is at the heart of Czech foreign policy since Czech officials and NGOs alike firmly believe that they have a moral obligation to help others struggling to be free because of their own peaceful transition to democracy in 1989. As noted in our series of cables on Czech democracy promotion last year (reflets), the GOCR also recognizes the security benefits of democracy promotion and the Czech Security Strategy identifies the promotion of "freedom, democracy, and the principles of rule of law" as a strategic national interest. The key partners in Czech transformational diplomacy are the MFA (particularly under the leadership of Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg and Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar), the NGO People in Need (PIN), former Czech President Vaclav Havel and the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC).

Czechs Emphasize Transformation Through Civil Society

13. The Czechs focus on "transformational cooperation" when speaking of democracy promotion in third countries, the key of which is the systematic cooperation and support for civil society. The MFA Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy monitors the status of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in priority countries and, as needed, identifies projects to establish and reinforce democratic institutions (primarily through educating civil society and supporting peaceful opposition). Some of the key priority countries for MFA funding are: Cuba, Belarus, Burma, Bosnia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine.

Czech Support for Free Media

¶4. The Czechs are very engaged in access to free media. In Belarus, they support the European Radio Belarus project (modeled on Radio Free Europe) which transmits independent content prepared by Belarusian journalists into Belarus. In Cuba and Iraq, as another example, they provide training, hardware and supplies for independent journalists. This training focuses on media ethics and best practices for reporting and photography. Besides providing training for Cuban journalists, many of whom end up as political prisoners, the Czech NGO People in Need makes a point of visiting all of the families of these political prisoners to bring news and supplies, but perhaps most importantly to show solidarity. PIN arranges medical assistance for the prisoners, enlisting sympathetic Cuban doctors and PIN also provides financial support to these prisoners and their families.

Capacity Building

¶5. The Czechs believe that a successful democratic transition requires preparation of civil society, democratic opposition leaders and elected officials in key areas such as judicial reform, social systems, economics, police and military reform restitution and privatization issues. Thus, they have provided this training in Belarus and other East European countries as well as Iraq. For use in this training, they have published a book describing Czech "lessons learned" during their transition to democracy, which has been translated into Spanish and Belarusian.

Willing to Chide Other Governments on Responsibilities

¶6. The Czechs are a lead nation when it comes to advancing human rights, and Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg is deservedly well-known for his fervent speeches on this issue.

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He does not hesitate to remind other EU member states of the importance of providing support for nascent democratic movements and succor to dissidents. At the September EU Foreign Minister's Meeting last week in Portugal, it was the Czech government that stepped forward and added Burma to the agenda. As well, Czech support for democratic change in Cuba has been invaluable, especially when other EU member states have wavered. PIN and the ICDC, for example, organizing a conference on Cuba policy in Berlin during the German EU presidency.

Embassy Partnership with Czechs

¶7. The Embassy frequently partners with the Czech government and Czech NGOs on democracy promotion. For instance, Post has supported PIN's Cuba awareness campaigns and sent the ICDC's Executive Secretary on a Volvis to Washington, New York and Miami. Most notably, however, in March of this year the Embassy partnered with the Czech MFA on a workshop "Supporting Change" regarding the role of Central Europe in democracy promotion (details available from Embassy Prague POC: Michael Feldman). The workshop, attended by European and U.S. officials and NGOs, highlighted the benefits of Central Europeans expanding their work with transition governments and dissidents. Embassy Prague also provides funding for Czech think tanks on training and internships for young Belarus democracy activists.

A Worthy Partner on Democracy Promotion

¶8. The Czech government is a committed partner with a proven track record on promoting democracy and human rights. They will remain a key interlocutor as we strive to advance the recommendations from the Democratic roundtables chaired by President Bush at the UN General Assembly.

THOMPSON-JONES